COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

# DIGEST

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*Do You Take This Union?*

## CSCE Staffers Observe Soviet Referendum

Soviet republics on March 17 held Mikhail Gorbachev's referendum on keeping the union together by asking voters to answer "yes" or "no" to the following question: "Do you consider it necessary to preserve the U.S.S.R. as a renewed federation of equal, sovereign republics in which the human rights and freedoms of people of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?"

Helsinki Commission staffers observed the process in Russia, Ukraine, Latvia and Kazakhstan—after having attended the March 3 "counter-referendums" in Estonia and Latvia. A Commission staff member also observed the March 31 independence plebiscite in Georgia.

According to TASS, about 76 percent of those who voted favored retaining the union. But, as was expected, all sides claimed victory. The outcome of the entire exercise, like the fate of the U.S.S.R. itself, has generated divergent and often conflicting assessments.

The next issue of the Digest will contain a larger analysis of the referendum and its implications. What follows are brief reports on the results and what Commission staffers saw on March 17.

**Pro-democratic opposition groups staged a rally in Kiev, Ukraine, on the eve of the March 17 referendum.**

### Russia

The Russian legislature added a question on the desirability of having a popularly elected president of the republic. In fact, for many voters and commentators, the referendum in Russia seemed the latest round in the heavyweight political struggle between Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin.

If Gorbachev could interpret Russia's 70 percent "yes" to the all-union question as a mandate, Yeltsin could also claim victory for Russia and himself: about 70 percent of voters approved the creation of a post that would be extremely powerful, that Yeltsin would surely win, and that would secure his position from future conservative challenges in the Russian parliament.

Commission staff observed nothing in visits to Moscow polling places that placed in doubt the integrity of the voting or ballot counting. Still, given Russia's enormous expanses and the continuing control of the Communist Party apparatus in many regions, especially in the countryside, many Muscovites voiced their conviction that the voting would be rigged to preserve the union.

That feeling might help explain the 85 percent support given by voters in the capital to a question on popular elections for the city's mayor.

### Ukraine

Voters in Ukraine were offered not only Gorbachev's formulation, but a second one canvassing support for Ukraine's 1990 Sovereignty Declaration, which gave republic laws precedence over all-union legislation and asserted Ukraine's right to its own currency and army.

The democratic opposition, which urged voters to reject Gorbachev's question, had unequal access to the media.

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe by law monitors and encourages progress in implementing the provisions of the Helsinki human rights accords. The Commission, created in 1976, is made up of nine Senators, nine Representatives and one official each from the Departments of State, Commerce and Defense.

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Commission staff visiting polling places in Kiev and surrounding villages observed irregularities in some districts, and there were reports of more widespread chicanery and intimidation in eastern Ukraine, where the Communist Party retains control.

Nevertheless, the voting seemed, for the most part, free and fair and resulted in a 70 percent "yes" to Gorbachev's question and 80 percent backing for the second question. In three oblasts in western Ukraine, a third question on independence for Ukraine gained 85 percent backing from the voters.

### Latvia

The Latvian Republic, which does not recognize Soviet law, refused to administer the all-Union referendum but made no attempt to stop it. Pro-Soviet groups and parties, like the Communist Party and Interfront, aided by representatives of central bureaucracies, organized the voting in military units, as well as territories and workplaces where they were concentrated.

In mostly non-Latvian areas, like Daugavpils, the process seemed reasonably fair, with some controls to prevent non-area residents from voting, although there were no observers from the Latvian Popular Front.

But many Riga polling places lacked voter lists and people could vote several times. In polling places controlled by the Communist Party, the military and Interfront, material was being distributed that showed how to vote "yes."

Non-resident military personnel could vote on March 17 and there were widespread reports of people voting "yes" under threats of losing their jobs. In sum, there were enough irregularities to compromise the preliminary results publicized by pro-Moscow sources, who claimed that almost 500,000 people had voted to maintain the union.

### Kazakhstan

The most interesting and noteworthy feature of the referendum in Kazakhstan was the question itself. While some republics added their own questions to the all-Union wording, the authorities in Kazakhstan altered Gorbachev's formulation to: "Do you consider it essential to preserve the USSR as a union of sovereign states [not republics] of equal rights?" Neither socialism nor the equality of rights of citizens, regardless of nationality, was mentioned.

On March 17, Commission staffers visited polling places in the Frunze region of Alma-Ata. They observed that ballot boxes were unsealed, which meant that any number of ballots could have been deposited.

More important, in Alma-Ata (and presumably elsewhere in Kazakhstan) there appeared to be weakly developed mechanisms to assure a fair vote and count, particularly the staffing of local election commissions with representatives of different political parties and organizations who could keep an eye on each other.

According to official Soviet sources, 94 percent of those who voted said "yes" to the question posed by the Kazakhstan's Supreme Soviet.

*—Commission Staff*

# DeConcini leads delegation to Yugoslavia and Albania

From March 22–28, Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman Dennis DeConcini led a congressional delegation to Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Albania. The delegation included, from the Commission, Representative Bill Richardson (D–NM) and Mr. William Fritts, Senior Advisor to the Secretary of Commerce, as well as Representatives E. Clay Shaw (R–FL), Bob McEwen (R–OH), Helen Bentley (R–MD) and Robert Dornan (R–CA).

In Hungary, the delegation attended sessions of the Seminar on The Parliament's Responsibility for Economic Development, which focused on economic and trade problems in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The Helsinki Commission co-sponsored the seminar along with the Hungarian Parliament and the International Foundation.

The delegation also met with Hungarian Prime Minister Jozsef Antall, members of FIDESZ (the Alliance of Young Democrats) and representatives of the Gypsy community in Hungary. The meetings focused on Hungary's experience with economic and political reform in the year since the Communists lost power to opposition parties.

In Yugoslavia, where recent popular unrest and differences among the constituent republics and provinces threatens to cause the country's collapse and even civil war, the delegation first visited Belgrade to meet with federal and Serbian republic leaders as well as with ethnic Serbian, Albanian and Hungarian opposition figures.

**Albania, the last bastion of Stalinism in Europe, held its first free elections on March 31.**

Following Belgrade, the delegation traveled to Zagreb, the capital of the Croatian republic, and then to Sarajevo, the capital of the republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina, where it also met with government leaders and representatives of opposition parties and ethnic communities. The visit came almost 1 year after the first official visit led by the Commission Co-Chairman to Yugoslavia. During that visit Senator DeConcini observed the first free elections in post-World War II Yugoslavia in the republic of Slovenia, and travelled to Kosovo in addition to Belgrade.

*"We cannot decide for the Yugoslavs what their future will be, but we can insist that if they wish to participate in Europe's affairs, they must adhere to Europe's principles."*

While in Yugoslavia, DeConcini said the delegation urged the Yugoslavs to maintain and build upon a dialogue among themselves that will lead to a just and peaceful solution to the many problems which are pulling their country apart.

"We cannot decide for the Yugoslavs what their future will be, but we can insist that if they wish to participate in Europe's affairs, they must adhere to Europe's principles," DeConcini said. "This can be done by holding the main Yugoslav players—the republics—to strict compliance with the commitments contained in the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent CSCE accords, regardless of whether they keep the federation, negotiate a new confederation or simply go their own separate ways."

Finally, the Commission stopped in neighboring Albania, which plans to hold its first multi-party elections on March 31. After decades of harsh repression at home and isolation from the outside world, Albania has been the scene of major reform efforts in the past year.

Among many other undertakings, the Albanian Government has released hundreds of political prisoners, allowed the practice of religion, opened its economy to foreign investment and sought full membership in the CSCE process.

This progress was welcomed by a delegation to Albania led by Co-Chairman DeConcini last August, which nevertheless concluded that additional progress was necessary before Albania's request to join the CSCE could be supported.

The elections will be key in this regard, and may also bring greater stability to a country from which tens of thousands have fled since the borders became more open last year.

The delegation met with president Alia, leaders of opposition parties, and human rights groups. Commission staff members remained in Albania after the delegation departed to observe the voting and ballot counting on election day.

The Commission delegation was the first U.S. congressional visit to Albania since the United States restored relations with that country on March 15.

Commission Chairman Steny Hoyer and Co-Chairman DeConcini welcomed the establishment of diplomatic ties, which, they said, will lead to dialogue and contacts that in turn "will help to create a more solid base for the building of democracy in Albania, marked by openness in society, the free flow of information and, above all, respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual."

*—Bob Hand*

# Chairman, Co-Chairman seek more support for Baltic states

Chairman Steny Hoyer (D–MD) and Co-Chairman Dennis DeConcini (D–AZ) have introduced resolutions in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate recommending that the United States expand and solidify its support for the Baltic States.

Hoyer and DeConcini said the successful conclusion of the war in the Persian Gulf will allow the United States "to once again focus on promoting democratic movements" in the Soviet Union.

Hoyer, who recently led a 13-member Helsinki Commission delegation on a fact-finding trip to Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, said the resolution is largely the result of meetings the delegation held with the Presidents of all three Baltic States as well as parliamentary representatives and spokesmen of parliamentary opposition and national minorities groups.

"We were told by the Presidents, parliamentarians and other government leaders of the Baltic States that American support is paramount to their struggle for freedom and independence," Hoyer said. "This resolution contains many of the ideas that we discussed with them."

The joint resolution seeks to:

—Establish U.S. "information offices" in each of the Baltic States to serve as a form of political recognition and support;

—Channel U.S. Government humanitarian aid and economic assistance, including management and training assistance, in addition to private sector humanitarian aid, to the Baltic States;

—Recognize, establish and maintain direct contacts with the Parliaments of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia as the legitimate, freely-elected and democratic representatives of the peoples of the Baltic States;

—Propose and seek support for observer status for the Baltic States in the 34-nation CSCE at the next Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the CSCE participating States.

Hoyer and DeConcini said that a proposal by the United States to allow participation in CSCE by Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia could place international pressure on the Soviet Government to come to a "peaceful resolution" of its dispute with the Baltic States.

Joining Hoyer in sponsoring the resolution in the House were: Commissioner Don Ritter (R–PA), Commissioner Christopher Smith (R–NJ),

Rep. Albert Bustamante (D-TX), Rep. Ben Cardin (D-MD), Rep. Chris Cox (R-CA), Rep. Richard Durbin (D-IL), Rep. Dennis Hertel (D-MI), Rep. Tom Lantos (D-CA), Rep. Bill Sarpalius (D-TX), Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY) and Rep. Craig Thomas (R-WY).

Co-sponsors in the Senate include: Commissioner Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY), Commissioner Wyche Fowler (D-GA) and Commissioner Malcolm Wallop (R-WY).

*—James Ridge*

# Could a CSCE Process Work in the Middle East?

A Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Middle East could contribute greatly to peace and stability in that region, Helsinki Commission Chairman Steny Hoyer (D-MD) told the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs during a March 14 hearing.

Chairman Hoyer and Co-Chairman Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ) were asked to testify on the viability of such a conference, modeled on the highly successful CSCE, by Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), chairman of the Subcommittee.

"Decades of interminable violence have not resolved the problems of the Middle East; on the contrary, it has seemed to make them more intractable," Hoyer told the Subcommittee. "The creation of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Middle East is an opportunity to bring healing and reconciliation to a region badly in need of both."

"Leaders in the Middle East and around the world seem to be slowly recognizing the potential of a CSCE-like process in the troubled region," DeConcini said. "Not only could such a process decrease the likelihood of future military confrontations, but it would also promote economic security, environmental protection, and contact among nations and peoples."

Hoyer said there are five aspects of the CSCE which should be considered with respect to their possible application to the Middle East:

Follow-up Meetings—The process mandated by the Helsinki Final Act which has allowed CSCE countries to both monitor and review implementation, while expanding the scope of their cooperation.

Political Status—The Final Act is not a legal treaty, but its provisions are equally binding as a political commitment undertaken by the participating states.

Consensus Decision-Making—Each participating country in the Helsinki Process is assured that important decisions will not be imposed upon them by a mere majority vote—consensus is the rule. Therefore, there is no risk in merely taking part in open dialogue and discussion within the process.

Covering All Issues—CSCE's 10 principles, which guide relations between member states, cover a wide range of issues in order to give each country "a stake in the game."

All the Players—Although CSCE's primary focus is on Europe, it includes the United States and Soviet Union in order to deal effectively with arms control and other issues. While the U.S. and Soviet Union would not necessarily be participants in a CSCME, the process would have to include the nations of the Middle East necessary to implement the objectives of the entire region.

Hoyer and DeConcini recently hand-delivered letters on the subject of a CSCME to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir of Israel, Sheikh Jabir al-ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah, the Amir of Kuwait, and King Fahd of Saudi Arabia while traveling with separate House and Senate delegations which visited the Middle East.

*—James Ridge*

# New CSCE Secretariat Open for business in Prague

The Charter of Paris for a New Europe, adopted in November 1990, took the unprecedented step of establishing three new CSCE institutions. These include a CSCE Secretariat in Prague, an Office for Free Elections in Warsaw, and a Center for the Prevention of Conflicts in Vienna.

So far, they are all "small"—one of the requirements demanded by the United States and some other participating States during the drafting of the Paris Charter.

Each of these institutions will have a director of senior rank, seconded by his or her government for a non-renewable 3-year term, and, as a rule, appointed by the Council of Foreign Ministers.

Appointment of officers to the institutions is based on a system of rotation among the 34 participating States, following French alphabetical order as is the custom in the CSCE. Officers are seconded by their governments for 2-year terms, with the possibility of one 1-year extension.

The CSCE Secretariat will be housed in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Its staff will consist of a Director, responsible to the Council of Foreign Ministers (through the Committee of Senior Officials); three Officers; and administrative and technical personnel as recruited by the Director.

The Secretariat is charged with providing administrative support to the meetings of the Council of Foreign Ministers and the Committee of Senior Officials (in conjunction with the country hosting the Council's meeting); maintaining an archive of CSCE documentation and circulating documents as requested by the participating States; providing information to individuals, NGOs, international organizations, and non-participating States; and providing appropriate support to the Executive Secretaries of CSCE summit meetings,

follow-up meetings, and inter-sessional meetings.

Because the Council of Foreign Ministers will not hold its first meeting until this June, the first set of Directors was selected by the Committee of Senior Officials at their first meeting in January.

Accordingly, the Director of the CSCE Secretariat will be Nils Eliasson, a Swede with considerable CSCE experience. The Secretariat's Officers will be determined by the drawing of lots. Officers will be seconded by their respective countries.

The CSCE Secretariat was formally opened in March by Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel. Its address is: CSCE Secretariat, Thunovska Ulice 12, Praha 1, Mala Strana 110 00 Czechoslovakia.

Next Month: The Center for the Prevention of Conflicts and the Office for Free Elections

*—Erika Schlager*

# Conference addresses Kurdish issues

On February 27, 1991, the "International Parliamentary Consultation on Kurdish Human Rights" was held in the Senate Foreign Relations hearing room. The conference was sponsored by the Danielle Mitterand Foundation, the Kurdish Instititue of Paris and the Congressional Human Rights Foundation.

Senators Claiborne Pell (D-RI) and Ted Kennedy (D-MA) chaired the proceedings at which members of the British, French, and Italian parliaments, and human rights experts discussed various Kurdish issues. In attendance were members of the press, the Kurdish American community and Kurds from Turkey, the Soviet Union, Iraq and Iran.

Approximately 25-30 million Kurds reside in portions of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and the Soviet Union, the crossroads of three dominant Middle Eastern civilizations—Arabic, Turkic and Persian.

Within the CSCE community, about 14 million Kurds live in Southeastern Turkey and about 500,000 live in the Soviet Caucasus region. About 600,000 reside in Western nations, including 10,000 in the United States.

The Kurds are believed to be descendants of Indo-European tribes which settled along the Zagros and Taurus mountain ranges about 4,000 years ago. Kurds are mostly Sunni Muslims, yet they are culturally and linguistically distinct from other peoples.

A major concern expressed at the Conference was the need for Kurdish issues to be addressed in post-Gulf War regional discussion.

Kurdish leaders argue that their geographical proximity to the conflict, substantial power base, and present lack of representation warrant at least participation in discussions on the region's future.

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The Kurds point out that they were the first victims of Iraqi aggression, and have long suffered at the hands of undemocratic and oppressive regimes.

Participants stressed that most Kurds do not envision the reaction of an independent Kurdish state, but rather seek democratic systems which would preserve their human rights and culture.

While Kurdish groups have violently clashed with one another in the past, leaders at the conference concurred that the Kurds were more unified now than ever.

Goals enunciated by conference participants included:

—Bringing the Kurdish issue before the U.N. and granting the Kurds observer status.

—Calling upon the United States and other Western governments to encourage Turkey, Syria, and Iran to recognize and respect the human rights of their Kurdish populations.

—Preserving Kurdish culture and heritage by establishing academic programs in Western universities.

—Increasing Western immigration and/or refugee quotas for Kurds.

The Commission visited Turkey in August 1989 and examined refugee camps for Iraqi Kurds fleeing chemical attacks. A major focus of ongoing CSCE dialogue with the government of Turkey concerns the situation of Kurds living in Turkey.

*—Mike Amitay*

# Oldest Helsinki monitor dies at 85

Oksana Meshko, veteran Ukrainian human rights activist, co-founder of the Ukrainian Helsinki Monitoring Group in 1976 and oldest member of any of the Soviet Helsinki Groups, died on January 2 in Kiev after suffering a stroke.

Mrs. Meshko, born in 1905, spent 7 years in Stalin's camps in the late 1940's and early 1950's. During the 1970's, she openly criticized the imprisonment of her son, Oleksander Serhiyenko, and other political prisoners.

In 1979, after the arrest of Mykola Rudenko and many of the other cofounders of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, Oksana Meshko became leader of the Group.

In 1980, at the age of 75, she was sentenced to 6 months in a strict regimen labor camp and 5 years internal exile for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda."

Following her exile term in the Soviet Far East, she returned to Kiev and until her death remained a passionate and dedicated advocate for human rights in Ukraine.

*Orest S. Deychakiwsky*

## FOR THE RECORD

ANATOLY SOBCHAK, Mayor of Leningrad, March 1991. "We are living now through a transition from a totalitarian system to a democratic one, and the forces of dictatorship and democracy live side by side. The danger of a new dictatorship, of military coups, of the use of military force against the people, is absolutely real under these conditions."

BORIS GIDASPOV, Leningrad's Communist Party Chief, March 1991. "Do you know what I would do if I were the party and the KGB? I would be quiet and go underground. The people, when they get sick and tired of the democrats, will crave a 'strong hand.' The people, in the final analysis, do not distinguish between democracy or authoritarianism. What matters for the people is goods in the shops."

PRESIDENT MIKHAIL GORBACHEV, in an apparent reference to RSFSR President Boris Yeltsin, March 1991. "If some madman should arise to provoke a breakup of our union, that would be a disaster for this country, for Europeans and for the entire world."

RSFSR PRESIDENT BORIS YELTSIN, March 1991. "I warned in 1987 that Gorbachev has a tendency in his character toward absolute, personal power. Now he is leading the country to a dictatorship but giving it the pretty name of 'presidential rule.'"

SECRETARY OF STATE JAMES BAKER, appearing on Meet the Press, March 1991. Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia "should be free to pursue their own hopes and aspirations for self-determination. There's a significant difference between the Baltic Republics on the one hand, and other republics, on the other. We will not permit—at least we cannot go along with—the use of force to suppress peaceful dissent, peaceful political expression."

POLISH PRESIDENT LECH WALESA, during his recent visit to Washington, DC, March 1991. "We are opening a big business here. There is big business for America, too. And America's participation is needed."

PRESIDENT BUSH, on the Los Angeles Police beating of a black motorist, March 1991. "Law enforcement officials cannot place themselves above the law that they are sworn to defend. It was sickening to see the beating that was rendered, and there's no way, in my view, to explain that away. It was outrageous."

## RECENT CSCE PUBLICATIONS

SOVIET AND BALTIC ELECTION REPORT—Single volume compilation of on-site Commission staff reports on parliamentary elections in the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and the Soviet Republics of Russia, Moldavia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Georgia, with an introduction. 188 pages.

CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN ELECTION REPORTS—Single volume compilation of on-site Commission staff reports on the 1990 elections held in the GDR, Hungary, the Yugoslav Republics of Slovenia and Croatia, Romania, the Czech and Slovak Republic, and Bulgaria, with an introduction. 157 pages.

STAFF REPORT ON HOMELESSNESS—August 29, 1990. Examines the causes, responses, and symptoms associated with the growing homelessness problem in the United States, and examines the problem in relation to international human rights commitments. The report is part of the Commission's continuing review of U.S. efforts to meet Helsinki process commitments. 77 pages.

COMMISSION TRIP TO THE BALTIC STATES AND MOSCOW—Report on the Helsinki Commission's recent fact-finding trip to Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Moscow. The 13-member congressional delegation met with all three of the Baltic presidents, as well as President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Republic. The report will be available in mid-March.

REPORT ON THE ESTONIAN REFERENDUM AND LATVIAN PUBLIC OPINION POLL ON INDEPENDENCE—On-site Commission staff report on the March 3, 1991, votes on independence in Estonia and Latvia, with an introduction. 5 pages.


# DIGEST

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